BROWNINGS' VERSE-FORM:

ITS ORGANIC CHARACTER

BY

ARTHUR BEATTY, A. B.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY,

IN THE

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE.

In this Essay only one aspect of Browning's art has been considered. Any systematic attempt to study his method of construction has not been attempted, as lying beyond its limited scope. But, as the imagination and harmony of poetry are never separable except by analysis, some consideration has been given to the structure, in order to appreciate the organic nature of the verse. The harmony, the verse, of his poetry has been considered in its organic nature — as the embodiment of the creations of his imagination, the forms of his "thoughts on life". We have not cared to ask whether these "thoughts" are "poetical" or not, believing that such matters can never be settled by any *à priori* theory of the beautiful. We have undertaken the humbler task of attempting to attain to the poet's standpoint, and then to enquire whether he has embodied his views of life in forms which are their organic, and, therefore, artistic and beautiful expression.

The books to which I am indebted are indicated in the foot-notes. But I owe a special debt to the works of my teachers; to Prof. W. J. Alexander's *Introduction to Browning*, to Prof. Hiram Corson's *Introduction to Browning*, and more directly to Prof. Thos. R. Price's *Construction and Types of Shakspere's Verse*, the sympathetic literary insight and beautifully accurate method of which I have taken as a model.

A. B.

Columbia University,
New York, February, 1897.

Why take the artistic way to prove so much ?
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth. . . . . Art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived,—
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

The Ring and the Book, Bk. XII.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

In the lines which stand at the beginning of the essay, Browning has explicitly stated the motives which have governed him in the writing of his great poem, *The Ring and the Book*, and, by a natural inference, in the whole of his long life-work. His conception of the end of art is the "speaking of truth;" but always in the way which is determined for art by the very nature of art itself. This exalted view of art at once lifts it far above the sphere of dilettante trifling, and places it on a level with all that has an intimate connection with life, with religion, philosophy and science, by bringing into inseparable connection art and the foundation of all of life,— truth. It is the same view as that which has been expressed by Matthew Arnold from his narrower point of view, that "poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,— to the question: How to live."[1] Or rather as the French critic, M. Brunetière, expresses it, "it seems that literature in the future ought to be not only an imitation or translation of life, *but rather a form of activity.*"[2]

A view of literature, such as this, insists, as does Browning in all his work, on the intimate connection between literature and life; and, like M. Brunetière, he holds that the life of literature is doomed when any divorce is made between it and the whole of life from which it draws its sustenance. On this aspect of Browning it is unnecessary to insist, in view of the numerous "interpretations," philosophical and religious, which we have with us in such

[1] *Preface* to his *Poems of Wordsworth.*

[2] Ferdinand Brunetière, *Nouvelles Questions de Critique*, "*Symbolistes et Décadents.*"

numbers. The only danger is that the synthesis of the poet may be entirely ignored in the industrious inquiries into his doctrines as a philosopher and theologian; and Mr. Edmund Gosse spoke a needed word when he recently said: "I am bound to tell you that I saw a different Browning from the hero of all the handbooks and 'gospels' which are now in vogue. People are beginning to treat this vehement and honest poet as if he were a sort of Marcus Aurelius and John the Baptist rolled into one. I have just seen a book in which it is proposed that Browing should supersede the Bible, in which it is asserted that a set of his volumes will teach religion better than all the theologies of the world. Well, I did not know that holy monster. Perhaps I was not good enough to know him. But what I saw was an unostentatious, keen, active man of the world, one who never failed to give good, practical advice in matters of business and conduct, one who loved his friends, but certainly hated his enemies; a man who loved to discuss people and affairs, and a bit of a gossip, a bit of a partisan, too, and not without his humorous prejudices. He was simple to a high degree, simple in his scrupulous dress, his loud, happy voice, his insatiable curiosity." The highest tribute one can pay to these words is that we can imagine them applying to Shakespeare "in habit as he lived," to whom Browning has so many similarities, in the whole and steady vision of life which is revealed in his "volumes light." The testimony of the intimate friend is confirmed by the study of the poet's work, which shows us "a man of the world," in the noblest sense. To him life was a whole; and he consistently refused to surrender any part of it in order to develop what some might call a higher and more essential part. This uncomprising love of fact is characteristic only of the greatest men; and even Shakespeare did not go through the world with keener and more enquiring eyes than Browning. "He must have a vision of all the facts," in the words of Hamilton W. Mabie, "and

giving each its weight and place, he must make his peace with them, or else chaos and death are the only certainties."[1] The "certainties" of life were the object of his unceasing search, and his work is but the record of a life spent in earnest "watch o'er man's mortality."

The fame of Browning has never suffered, nor is it likely to suffer, because he has failed to have something to say. He has always been credited with having a message, whatever have been the doubts as to what the message is. It is rather on the other side of the poet's work that he has been attacked from the beginning of his career. It has always been acknowledged that he fulfils one side of the poet's vocation, by "speaking truth"; but is has been as strenuously maintained that he has failed to give his truths concrete, that is, artistic, form. In short, he has been charged with a lack of "the sense of form"; and it is with this charge of "lawlessness" that he goes on to deal in the lines which we have chosen as the text of this essay. The theme of Art is declared to be truth; but the other side of the matter is not neglected. Truth, he says, can be told "in Art's way" only by giving it a concrete *form* — by sufficing the eye, for only thus can truth be told with power to "save the soul." By this Browning means that poetry does not present the truth directly, as abstract theorems or propositions, but indirectly, or "obliquely," as individualized and particularized in concrete, sensuous forms. Thus the true poet, to tell the truth "in Art's way," must not only be endowed with the power of seeing the truth. He must also see beauty, as necessarily connected with the truth; and he must satisfy our whole nature by showing us the truth and the beauty not separately, but as fused together into one organic, concrete whole. Thus the universality and abstraction of thought is presented in the living, sensuous forms of Art. The antithesis between the universal and particular is resolved by representing the

[1] *Essays in Literary Interpretation*, p. 114.

universal through the particular, by giving a concrete, living embodiment to a universal truth.[1] In Browning's own words, Art is the "mediate word" of the truth; the form by which the truth reaches us, and through which the poet speaks to the universal in us — speaks to us not as "men," that is, to us as individuals, but to us as "mankind." "Song's the poet's art," and he must refrain from speaking "naked thoughts;" but he must drape his thoughts "in sights and sounds." He must "*make things*," instead of "*writing thoughts about them*"; else he foregoes his divine mission "to bury us with glory, pouring heaven into this shut house of life."[2] Art repeats the miracle of the incarnation, Browning would say; — before the Word dwelt among men and manifested to them his glory, full of grace and truth, *he became flesh.*

We thus see that Browning recognizes, in theory at least, the importance of form in the domain of art; as we have seen, he regards it as the essential thing, without which poetry cannot be. It will be found that there is no contradiction between the critic and the poet, when both are studied from the correct point of view. And, in the first place, it is necessary to understand that, while Browning fully recognizes the great importance of form, he in no wise regards it *as an end in itself;* but always as *organic* to the thought and emotion of the poem. His life and work were never at odds; and as he looked upon life as a whole, and not to be broken into parts, so he views art as an organism in which form and content are not brought together in any accidental or arbitrary way, but are inseparable save in abstraction. In his creed of art, smoothness of verse, polished academic diction, or the dogma of any cult which would separate art from life, or form from content, can have no place whatever. With Browning, the form is regarded as the embodiment of the content. No poet has

[1] Hegel, *Aesthetik* (*Introduction, Bosanquet's Translation.*)

[2] "*Transcendentalism.*"

had a clearer conception of the organic nature of literature and of poetry. It would be idolatry to say that this ideal is unerringly and unfailingly fulfilled; but considering the vastness of his outlook, the great range of his themes, and the great volume of his work, we have had few poets who have so completely succeeded in clothing their thoughts and emotions in forms which so completely answer to the animating life principle within. As he has said of Shelley, "his works show the whole poet's function of beholding with an understanding keenness the universe, nature and man, in their actual state of perfection in imperfection; and at the same time the power of delivering his attained results in an embodiment of verse more closely answering to, and indicative of, the process of the informing spirit — with a diction more adequate to the task in its natural and acquired richness, its material colour, and spiritual transparency, — than can be attributed to any other writer whose record is among us."[1] Shelley is ranked high by Browning because his poetry is "a sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal;"[1] and at the same time possesses an embodiment which is expressive of the processes of the informing spirit.

This is the way by which we must approach the work of Browning, if we are to appreciate the artistic powers which are brought by the poet to the utterance of his thoughts on man, on nature, and on human life. The form — the verse, language, and all the elements which enter into expression in the broadest sense — must never be looked at as something which can be analyzed, or be judged as either good or bad, apart from the substance. These two are elements in one organic whole, co-operating to give the poet's interpretation of life; and where they can be separated without any mutual hurt they have never

[1] Browning, *Essay on Shelley*.

been fused into artistic unity. In a true poem, the message can never be evaluated apart from the form which embodies it, nor can the form be judged as beautiful or ugly apart from the message of the poem. This is true of all poetry of the highest order; and there is no body of poetry to which it more closely applies than to Browing's work. The artistic quality of the form, or the beauty of the art-product can be judged only when the thought is sympathetically understood; otherwise, the characteristic and organic beauty of the poem will be unperceived.

Poetry is the most intellectual of the arts, being realized less in external sensuous forms, and more in the inner world of the feelings and ideas. In poetry, as compared with such an art as painting, the sensuous appeals to us much less directly, and we are thrown back more to the world of inner thought. John La Farge has well stated the impression made by painting. "Who shall fathom the impressions made by art?— impressions which become confused, when one tries to declare them and describe them; strong and clear if we feel them again, even by the recall of memory; so that we realize how much of ourselves constituted the feelings which seemed to come out of the things that struck us. In our art these impressions are tangible, if I may say so. We enjoy what we think is the representation of the certain things, at the same time that some sense of what they mean for our mind affects and moves us. These figures, these objects, which seem to be the thing itself to a certain part of our intelligence, make a sort of bridge over which we pass to reach that mysterious impression which is represented by form as a sort of hieroglyph; a speaking, living hieroglyph, not such a one as is replaced by a few characters of writing. . . An art more complicated certainly than literature, but infinitely more expressive, since, independently of the idea, its sign, its living hieroglyph, fills the soul of the painter with the splendour that things give; their beauty, their contrast,

their harmony, their colours,— all the undivided order of the external universe."[1]

Since the signs of poetry are, to a large degree, conventional, and appeal to our aesthetic sense only to a slight degree directly through presentation, but mainly indirectly, through representation, we are forced to realize the situation in a poem by our imagination. The scene is only hinted at in the signs of poetry, and these signs can, in themselves and apart from association of idea, only to a slight degree "fill our soul with the splendour that *things* give.' Thus, in poetry we are more and more forced to make certain whether we apprehend the truth of a poem, before we can say whether we see its characteristic beauty. Unless we are capable of responding to the truth of a poem, we can never respond to the beauty of the form in which the truth is organically embodied. And on the other hand, as we understand, in the true sense, the meaning of a true poem, our feeling for its beauty grows accordingly. There can be no divorce between the intellect and the feelings in poetry; but they must "rise or sink together, dwarfed or god-like, bond or free." Smoothness or ruggedness in verse can, in themselves, have no aesthetic significance, apart from the thought, feeling or action of the poem. It is the peculiar glory of the highest poetry that there is no separation between the idea and its sign; that it summons into activity all our powers in order to realize it as an organic whole; and it is only as we do respond with our whole nature that we read the message which the highest poetry alone can give us.[2]

Thus, seeing the characteristic beauty of an organic whole implies seeing as one the form and the content, not as independent parts, but in relation to each other, and as inseparable parts which co-operate to the making of one harmonious whole. Thus, too, every poet will have a peculiar

[1] *Considerations on Painting*, pp. 117-118.

[2] Compare Barrett Wendell, *English Composition*, p. 288, ff.

form organic to his every poem; and, moreover, the entire body of his work will bear the marks of his peculiar burden. This is true of Browning; and as he has gone far out of the beaten paths of conventional poetry, the forms which were necessary to embody the results of his wide study of life have been equally unconventional. His thought has been so novel, and the wide range of his intellect has made such demands on the understanding of his readers, that the vast majority has been unable to pass from the articulating thought to the subtler art which is at the basis.

Browning first attracted attention as a sturdy thinker and reasoner in verse; and so the first criticism brought against him was, in general, that of "obscurity." The critics had not as yet penetrated the thought to the form beneath. But, in time, the thought of his poetry became a part of the common stock-in-trade of the times; and it was in consequence found comparatively lucid and simple. Attention was then turned to the form of his poetry, and the usual criticism of it now is that it betrays a great lack of "artistic sense." Though these two charges against the poet have never been entirely separated, yet the emphasis placed upon each in turn marks two important stages in the evolution of Browning criticism. In this Browning is not at all unique, but has shared the fate of all poets who have strayed from the paddock of convention. It has been the fate of all original poets to be judged, or rather misjudged, by rules and standards of criticism which their poetry has rendered entirely obsolete; and when we meet with such an one, it will be well for us to reconsider the grounds on which we found our judgments of poetry and artistic beauty. The history of English poetry has shown that we must be ever on the watch for new types of literature, and that we must beware of condemning works as shapeless and chaotic, in which a later time, with a wider and more sympathetic view, may see everywhere "proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where

our careless eye had seen nothing but accident." Shakespeare, tried by the standards of the "classical" criticism, was nothing more than a "drunken savage;" and Milton was condemned by Dr. Johnson for "grossly violating the laws of metre" in the very verses which we now consider to mark the supreme excellence of blank verse. A due consideration of the man's work as a whole would have made these false criticisms impossible; and, in the same way, Browning's alleged "obscurity" and "neglect of form" may be dispelled by an attempt to attain to the point of view from which he surveys the universe, nature and man.

The aim of Browning as a poet is summed up in a pregnant sentence in the preface to *Sordello:* "My stress lay on the *incidents in the development of a soul:* little else is worth study." This shows the interest he had in the phenomena of the mind; but it also shows his equally strong feeling for fact — for the common facts in the life of his fellowmen. Thus, while he studies the soul as the one thing worthy of his attention, his realistic turn of mind prevents him from taking an exclusive interest in the workings of his own soul, as the sum and substance of the whole universe. He studies the souls of men as they are revealed by the *incidents* in their development. But he has not a merely spectacular interest, on the other hand, in these incidents. They are interesting to him only as they reveal the individual soul at some particular stage of its development. The incidents with which he deals are interesting only because they reveal the one thing of supreme worth to him — the human soul, tending "on its lone way" to God, however thwarted and bound by its "baffling and perverting carnal mesh." Each soul is a microcosm, and contains within itself the essential elements of the Universe. It carries its life within; and if the potentialities of that soul are realized, it reaches its perfection and its heaven. "Truth is within ourselves," says Paracelsus; and so is all

which is really ours. Knowledge, truth, perfection, or anything we may set up as an end to be attained must be made vital and personal if they are to be possessed by the soul. None of these things are to be attained by a conquest from without, but by growth and development from within. And the end of perfection is placed by Browning far beyond the possibility of attainment in this present life. "Life is probation and the earth no goal, but starting-point of man," says the aged Pope; and yet the identity of the soul's life in every state remains, and this life is an integral part of the self-development which is to be perfected in another and freer sphere. The soul is infinite; but, fixed "mid this dance of plastic circumstance, this Present," it must "fit to the finite its infinity." Amid the helps and hindrances of the earth-life,

> "I say that man was made to grow, not stop:
> That help he needed once, and needs no more,
> Having grown up but an inch by, is withdrawn:
> For he hath new needs, and new helps to these";

and thus he must go on until at last he reaches

> "the ultimate angels' law,
> Indulging every instinct of the soul
> There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing."[1]

What Tennyson has said of Virtue, Browning would say of each soul:

> Nay, but she aimed not at glory, no lover of glory she;
> Give her the glory of *going on and still to be.*[2]

Thus Browning lays stress on the *process* of development, and is much less interested in the result. Or what would be truer to say, he sees the result in the process and draws no line of separation between them. He sees each incident *sub specie aeternitatis*, and therefore fraught with an infinite significance. He believes as passionately as Dante that the soul can attain to the Truth; but, with him the *struggle* toward the highest is the attainment of the Truth, because by the struggle are called forth the capabilities

[1] *A Death in the Desert.*
[2] *Wages.*

and potentialities of the soul. The perfection of the soul Dante compares to the calm rest of the beast in its familiar lair;[1] but Browning never represents the soul as having already attained. "What's come to perfection perishes," is held to be true in life as in art; and the soul is never represented at rest, but as in eternal process of development:

> "How inexhaustibly the spirit grows!
> One object, she seemed erewhile born to reach
> With her whole energies and die content,—
> So like a wall at the world's edge it stood,
> With naught beyond to live for,—is that reached?—
> Already are new undreamed energies
> Outgrowing under, and extending farther
> To a new object; there's another world."[2]

The dying Paracelsus was at last made wise to see his former error in despising what man had accomplished in the past. Once he would have men despise the past, as "only a scene of degradation, ugliness and tears, the record of disgraces best forgotten, a sullen page in human chronicles fit to erase." And he now saw how false were his hopes to "change man's condition" in "one day, one moment's space." He now perceived that "there exists no law of life outside of life," and that perfection is attained "painfully, while hope and fear and love shall keep us man." Now Love taught him

> "To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
> To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
> To see a good in evil, and a hope
> In ill-success; to sympathize, be proud
> Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
> Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
> Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts;
> All with a touch of nobleness, despite
> Their error, upward tending all though weak."[3]

This not only is the final faith of Paracelsus: it is the poet's own essential view of life; and from this we can see

[1] *Divina Commedia, Paradiso, IV, 11, 124–129.*
[2] *Luria*, Act, V.
[3] *Paracelsus*, V.

why the incidents in the development of souls were of such supreme significance to him. Hence we see, too, the dramatic character of his genius; for it is the essence of the dramatist to be supremely interested in men. But while Browning is dramatic, he is so in a peculiar way. He is interested in the incidents of a soul, primarily, *and not with man in action.* Thus we can see the truth of the criticism that, as a rule, his dramas are deficient in action, and are studies of single characters.[1] He is interested in the inner history of men, rather than in the outer act, and he could not give the requisite attention to outward accessories necessary to the drama. No one knew Browning's weakness in the drama better than himself. It is not at all a characteristic form of his art; and he was led to it by particular circumstances, not through the spontaneous working of his genius. It could not be otherwise. Browning was never interested in groups of persons, but in individual souls. He was not interested in the play of men on one another; but in the relations which men's souls hold to the world about them. His chief interest is not in what man *does*, but in what he *is*.

If the regular drama was an unsuitable instrument of expression for Browning, his genius has taken up and adapted to its own purposes, one peculiarly fitted for its use — the "dramatic monologue." In this form all his most characteristic work is cast. It is described by himself as "poetry, always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine." This art-form stands midway between the soliloquy and the drama proper by having on the one hand more than one *dramatis persona;* and by having on the other only one speaker. The speaker is taken in the moment of some crisis, some great temptation, or other experience which cuts down through all the masks of convention, self-deceit or cunning, and leaves the soul in its essential vileness or

[1] Walker, *The Greater Victorian Poets.*

purity clear and manifest to our sight. In these circumstances the speaker gives his account of the experience to another person who is listening. Of this second person — and by his presence the dramatic element of the poem enters — we know only by means of the words or actions of the speaker. But by repetition of this second person's words, by answering his questions or objections, the character and belief of the silent person are given as clearly as the speaker's own.

This second person is rarely, if ever, a puppet at which the speaker directs his words, and which is only an excuse for the speaker's expressing himself. Though some of the monologues shade down so as to be almost indistinguishable from the soliloquy, there is, for the most part, in each poem a dramatic situation which could not have come into existence had the persons of the poem been other than they are. *A Forgiveness*, for instance, reveals at the end a most striking dramatic situation — a husband confessing to the priest who was responsible for the murder of the wife. In the love poems, on the other hand, the dramatic element is often weak, and the song becomes a simple soliloquy. *Cristina*, *Evelyn Hope*, and *Love Among the Ruins* are poems of this class; and it is to be noted that where the dramatic element is weak, the lyric element is correspondingly strong, and the poems are finished with elaboration and polish.

Since the whole dramatic situation is left to be gathered as we go along, from the speaker's words alone, this form is a difficult one; though most of the difficulties are removed when we understand its principles. But this form of Browning's poetry, more than anything else, has led people to declare it obscure and inartistic. Therefore an appreciation of the method of this form is the one prerequisite of seeing the organic nature of the whole body of his work. Only by a proper appreciation of the nature of the dramatic monologue can all the elements of expres-

sion in his poetry be perceived. The form of the monologue demands, as a rule, terseness and closeness of speech; and its dramatic nature demands abrupt turns of speech, sudden transitions, and even ellipses, to express the changes of mood, and turns of argument, induced by the silent second person. The whole situation must be grasped, and all interpreted in the light of it. We must imagine the exact circumstances; and it will be found that the more perfectly we do so, the more perfectly the whole poem will be found to answer to Aristotle's dictum, and will be found to have "for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and will thus resemble a living organism."[1] The more we enter into the spirit of the dramatic monologue, the more apparent will become the orderly arrangement of all its parts, — plot, character, language, metre; and the more will the poem as an organic whole commend itself to our sense of harmony and beauty. And that is what is meant by saying that his art is completely *organic*. Nothing is explained in an external manner; but all is *embodied*.

Richard Holt Hutton has said of Browning that he "cannot paint action"; but that he is "a great master of the intellectual approaches to action".[2] This criticism falls beside the mark; for it fails to recognize the fact that Browning holds in inseparable unity thought and action, and represents them as one. He represents the character and the action which is the natural outcome of that character. In the words of Mabie, the dramatic monologue has this great advantage over other forms of expression, that it gives us, with the truth, the character which that truth has formed.[3] It combines in a peculiar manner the lyric, introspective development of poetry, with the objectivity of the ancient drama, without giving undue prominence to either tendency.

[1] *Poetics*, *XXIII.*, 1.

[2] *Essays Literary and Theological.*

[3] *Essays in Literary Interpretation*, p. 134.

Those who deny to Browning "the sense of form" may mean that he has never patiently elaborated his poetry after it is once conceived; never recast, revised, or polished, as one would a gem. In this sense, Browing would be the last to claim the "sense of form". But if by this term is meant the power of conception and execution at a jet, as it were; then this artistic power must be claimed for him. It must even be claimed in a high degree; for in the work of few poets do we meet with such a spontaneous blending of sound and sense into one organic whole, as in Browning. Thought and expression are blended so that they are no longer two things, but one. Speech is wedded to thought, and form and content are become one flesh in the *dramatic monologue.*

In illustration of what has been said, let us now take an example of Browning's work, which has been universally admired; and, by an examination of its merits, let us arrive at some of the reasons why we give it our approving admiration. From an analysis of this one slight example, we may be able to discover some of the principles which prevail in the whole body of his poetical work. A poem which almost all critics agree in considering a triumphant example of Browning's method is *My Last Duchess. Ferrara*, a poem which appeared in 1842, in "Dramatic Lyrics" (*Bells and Pomegranates*, No. III.)

The scene is laid in Ferrara, whose "wide and grass-grown streets" seemed to *Childe Harold* cursed with the "changing mood of petty power" of the house of Este. Here the "miserable despot tried in vain to quell the insulted mind he could not quench," and even yet the injured shade of Tasso reproached the ungrateful city, in which he was in life and death "the mark where Wrong aim'd with her poisoned arrows — but to miss." The action of the poem opens at a characteristic moment in the life of the speaker, the Duke of Ferrara. He is on the eve of betrothal to the daughter of the Count; and, in the light of this act, and his heartless tale of his heart-broken "last Duchess," his

character stands forth in the strongest possible relief If the plot were cast in the form of narration, this point would be the climax. We see that the husband who classes his wife's portrait with the Neptune by Claus of Innsbruck is beyond the hope of redemption. Nought remains but the subsidence of the plot to its tragic close.

The situation is this: The Duke has retired from the company, assembled, perhaps, to celebrate his betrothal. He displays the portrait of his dead wife to the agent of the Count, who is a dilettante trifler in art, like himself. The envoy has noted the smile on the face of the portrait, and asked how the artist has produced it. In explaining "how such a glance came there," he incidentally, and by the way, merely, tells how he at once crushed the smiles and life out of a sweet and lovely woman. It is to be noted that he never thinks of the crime he has committed. He is wholly unconscious of that. His mind never for a moment dwells on the loveliness of the dead woman. Her excellences are spoken of only in connection with his explanation of the heartless dilettante's question. Yes, the portrait is life-like without a doubt; and, that point settled, they turn from the picture to the "company below." On the way down, the "next Duchess" and the Neptune occupy their attention equally!

In the versification of this poem, the most marked feature is the great freedom of flow, combined with terseness of expression. It is in the rhyming couplet, but the rhyme does not obtrude itself, because of the use of enjambement in those lines where the thought demanded an unbroken flow. It reads like blank verse through most of the poem, until within a dozen lines of the end, when the rhyme comes out strongly, completing at once the sense and the effect of regularity and system in the structure of the verse:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
"Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
"Must never hope to reproduce the faint
"Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace — all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, — good! but thanked
Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who 'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
"Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss
"Or there exceed the mark" — and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wit to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
— E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We 'll meet

The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we 'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Though the even flow of the verse in this poem is very noticeable, it will be found on examination to have no merely mechanical regularity. As a whole, the verse of the poem is calm and stately, in keeping with the proud, exclusive character of the speaker. But, when the thought and feeling demand it, there are departures from the normal iambic flow, which are most expressive. Lines 1 and 2 have the unaccented syllable of the first foot dropped, giving to both a strongly accented beginning. This must be felt to be organic, as well as the departures in lines 17, (Her mantle laps Over my lady's wrist); 28, (some officious fool Broke in the orchard); and 43, (I choose Never to stoop). The dropping of the unaccented syllable (the anacrusis) gives to these lines a new and most expressive melody.

The place of the caesura varies so as to give differences of movement to certain passages. Thus, in ll. 1-13, it comes about the middle, with the exception of ll. 2, 5 and 10. This gives a calm and flowing movement in harmony with the proud speaker. In ll. 43-47 it comes, with one exception (l. 46), after the second accent. This, with the short sentences, gives an arrested movement and broken flow expressive of the cruel tragedy which crushed that joyous life.

The verses are arranged in organic groups, which are, to all intents and purposes, strophes. Contrast, for instance, the short, abrupt groups in ll. 42-45; 45-46; 46-47 and 47-48,

with the long group, 48-53, which follows. Note, too, how this is interrupted by the short strophe,

Nay, we 'll go
Together down, sir,

which is expressive of the action. This is followed by a strophe which carries the poem to its melodious end.

Another element which is important in Browning's poetry may be noted — the alliteration. In l. 2, '*L*ooking as if she were a*l*ive. I ca*ll*,' the alliteration has a fusing effect on the whole line. In ll. 18 and 19, 'the *f*aint Hal*f*-*f*lush,' the two half-lines are fused. This form is frequent in Browning. Again, in line 27 there is an example of alliteration within a phrase in the single line.

In the analysis of Browning's poetic art, as seen in this example, we have tried to keep to the front the fact that all the elements of poetic expression — foot, line, strophe, metre, or what not,— are not considered as constituting an end in themselves; but are consistently regarded as the incarnation of the thought, emotion and action of the poem. We have seen how the various elements have an artistic significance only through their being the embodiment of the poet's thought; and how the form assumes Protean shapes in response to the demands of the informing spirit.

Moreover, we have seen that this great variety of form has caused the verse to be condemned as shapeless, and beyond the reach of a justifying analysis, by those who have not recognized its organic character. It is proposed therefore, to examine the verse-form of Browning as shown in: (1) The Verse-Forms; (2) The Strophe-Forms; (3) The Blank Verse. The attempt will be made to test each form as the organic expression of the poet's mind working through many forms; but chiefly through his most characteristic art-form — the dramatic monologue.

CHAPTER II.

THE VERSE-FORMS.

The analysis of the poem in the first chapter shows the great freedom of rhythm which is characteristic of Browning's most admired work. This freedom has also been explained and justified, on the ground that metre is not regarded by him as an end in itself. Mere smoothness was the last thing to which he would have thought of striving to attain; for the metre is not considered as anything apart from the content of the poem, but as its very form and embodiment. Since the rhythm is obedient to the many moods and emotions of the poet, the verse has a freedom of movement which is displeasing to many who have been accustomed to a smoother flow in verse. The result of this has been that Browning has been condemned as 'rugged,' 'harsh,' and 'unmusical.' This charge he has borne in common with those poets who have attempted a rhythm more complex than is usual — with Milton in the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, and with Tennyson in *Maud*. People are loth to condemn such acknowledged artists as Milton and Tennyson, as so much of their work is pronounced by the common voice to be artistic, and is amply appreciated. Yet, Tennyson preferred reading *Maud* to any other poem of his, because of the greater complexity of its music. His poetry is taken as the extreme length to which musical verse can be carried; and yet he did not regard mere smoothness of verse as an object to be striven for. His own practice shows far otherwise. Thus, in his blank verse, he does not maintain the regular alternation of unaccented and accented syllables; but frequently writes such a line as:

With the air of the trumpet round him, and leaps in;

or:

Bubbled the nightingale and heeded not;

and lines like these occur in his most carefully-wrought poems. In protest against those who demand a mechanical regularity in rhythm, "he declared that his own poetry was easy enough to read aloud, if people would only read it just as it was written *and not try to force the accent.*"[1]

By this he means that his verse is accentual verse, primarily; the accents making the verse, and not the verse the accents; and the accents being those which are natural to the language used to express the particular idea or emotion. The same thing is stated by Coleridge in the preface to *Christabel*: "The metre of the *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere end of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion."

Both of these poets were protesting against the judgment of their poetry by too narrow canons. Both are in substantial agreement; and though neither attempted to give any scientific account of his own workmanship, their general meaning is perfectly clear. The words of Coleridge imply that there is a unit of measure in the line — the *foot* — which is made up of two parts, one accented syllable and one or two unaccented syllables. The accented syllable is the primary and most important element of the foot, being the nucleus, as it were, around which are grouped the unaccented syllables in varying number and order. The number of the accented syllables indicates

[1] J. Knowles: *Nineteenth Century*, Jan., 1893.

the number of feet in the line; and the unaccented syllables,—according to their number and grouping about the accented syllables, and the uniformity in occurrence of these groups,—give the special rhythm to each line and groups of lines, or strophes.

Thus the classes of feet are:

An accented syllable, followed by one unaccented syllable (Trochee).[1]

An accented syllable, preceded by one unaccented syllable (Iamb).

An accented syllable, followed by two unaccented syllables (Dactyl).

An accented syllable, preceded by two unaccented syllables (Anapæst).

Lines made up of an uninterrupted series of each of the classes of foot are termed Trochaic, Iambic, Dactylic and Anapæstic lines, respectively. In addition to these four classes of lines, there is another large and important class, which has a rhythm not explicable in accordance with the constitution of either of these classes. It is usual to reduce it to either one of them by theoretically dropping or adding syllables. But this class is so important in Browning, and has such a distinct quality, that any adequate classification of his metres must give it a separate place. An examination of this class shows that the verse is made up in one of two ways: (1) by the blending of dactyls with trochees; (2) by the blending of anapæsts with iambs. The Greek prosodists recognized a similar line in Greek poetry, and called it a Logaœdic line, because its movement resembled that of prose (λόγος). This name we shall adopt, as it is descriptive of the noble freedom of some of Browning's best verse; combining, as it does, the unfettered movement of the noblest prose with the true poetic cadence.

[1] *Trochee.* The common classical nomenclature is retained, as it is familiar enough not to be misunderstood.

The basis for the classification of Browning's metres will, therefore, be:

(1) The kind of foot (or feet) which preponderate in the line.

(In many lines there are interchanges of feet which are so slight as not to disturb the regular movement.)

(2) The number of feet in the line.*

I. TROCHAIC METRES.

Lines of one foot:

Ever [1]
Never (*Life in a Love*)
Day ʌ [2] (*Pippa Passes*)

Lines of two feet:

And the blue eye
Dear and dewy (*A Pretty Woman*)
While I live ʌ (*In A Year*)

Lines of three feet:

See the creature stalking (*A Woman's Last Word*)
Was it wrong to own ʌ (*In A Year*)

Lines of four feet:

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays ʌ

[1] The accented syllables are indicated in full-faced letters.
[2] The Caret indicates a catalectic line, i. e., one in which the last foot is incomplete.

* It is to be noted that *differences of stress* on the several accented syllables, and on the unaccented syllables, are not here taken into account. To do so would make the subject too complex. But these differences are important.

Thus, in dactylic and anapæstic lines, the differences of stress on the unaccented syllables give a foot of $-\smile-$ instead of $-\smile\smile$ or $\smile\smile-$, giving the Cretic measure.

The feet also suffer syncopation, very often at the close of trochaic lines. Syncopation also occurs in the line, two syllables being sometimes syncopated, e. g.,

The curd o' the cream ʌ ʌ, flower o' the wheat, as it were. This gives a beautiful effect.

(The whole poem of *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* is written in alternate full and catalectic lines, and shows well the effect of the dropping of the unaccented syllable.)

Lines of five feet:

There they are, || my fifty men and women [1] (*One Word More*)

Here's my case. || Of old I used to love him,
This same unseen friend || before I knew ∧ (*Fears and Scruples*)

Lines of six feet:

At the midnight || in the silence of the sleep-time.
(*Epilogue to 'Asolando'*)

Where the quiet colored end || of evening smiles ∧
(*Love Among the Ruins*)

Lines of seven feet:

No example of a full verse.

All the long, lone summer day, || that greenwood life of ours ∧
(*Lyric to 'The Eagle'*)

Lines of eight feet:

There's a woman like a dew-drop, she's || so purer than the purest.
(*Mertoun's Song, in "The "Blot in the 'Scutcheon"*)

O'er the grandeur and the beauty || lavished through the whole ascent ∧ (*La Saisaiz.*)

II. IAMBIC METRES.

Lines of one foot:

Beloved
Removed (*Life in a Love*)

Lines of two feet:

The dim dead woe (*James Lee's Wife*)

Lines of three feet:

As one at first believes (*The Lost Mistress*)

Lines of four feet:

How very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me, (*Easter Day*)

[1] The || marks the caesura, which is "the pause attending the conclusion of a period, or of some logical section of a period when that pause occurs any where else than at the end of a line." Masson, *Milton's Works*, Vol. I, cxxvii.

Lines of five feet:

Very common, of course, as it is the metre of blank verse, and of the heroic rhyming couplet.

The many years of pain || that taught me art. (*Cleon*)

Lines of six feet:

May light my joyous heart || to thee its dwelling place.
(*In A Gondola*)

O trip and skip, Elvire! || Link arm in arm with me. (*Fifine*)

Lines of seven feet:

Be love your light and trust your guide, || with these explore my heart. (*Lyric to "Shah Abbas."*)

III. DACTYLIC METRES.

This class of metres is very scarce.

Lines of two feet:

Digging out deniers. (*Pisgah Sights II.*)

IV. ANAPAESTIC METRES.

Lines of two feet:

Let the corpse do its worst (*After*)

Lines of three feet:

Of the million or two, more or less. (*Instans Tyrannus*)

Lines of four feet:

As she brushed it, || the cornice-wreath blossomed anew
(*Love in a Life*)

Not a word to each other; || we kept the great pace
(*Ghent to Aix*)

Lines of five feet:

On my knees put up both little feet! || I was sure if I tried
(*The Englishman in Italy*)

Lines of six feet:

'Tis the regular pad of the wolves || in pursuit of the lives in the sledge (*Ivàn Ivànovitch*)

V. LOGAOEDIC METRES.

This class of metres has two distinct varieties, which may be best designated Trochaic-logaoedic, and Iambic-logaoedic; the former being verses which begin with an accented syllable, and the latter those which begin with an unaccented syllable.

Lines of two feet:

(*Troch-log.*) So the year's done with.
Love me forever (*Earth's Immortalities*)

(*Iamb-log.*) And the world has changed (*James Lee's Wife* i)

Lines of three feet:

(*Troch-log.*) Crumbling your hounds their messes
(*Song in 'Pippa'*)

(*Iamb-log.*) I know there shall dawn a day (*Reverie*)

Lines of four feet:

(*Troch-log.*) Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
Sit and watch by her side an hour. (*Evelyn Hope.*)

(*Iamb-log.*) And quench its speed in the slushy sand
(*Meeting at Night*)

Lines of five feet:

(*Troch-log.*) Quenched lay their caldron, || cowered i' the dust the crew (*The Ring and the Book*, I., 584)

(*Iamb-log.*) The curd o' the cream, || flower o' the wheat as it were.
(*The Ring and the Book*, I., 918)

Lines of six feet:

(*Troch-log.*) Would that the structure brave, || the manifold music I rear. (*Abt Vogler*)

First I salute this soil of the blessed, || river and rock!
(*Pheidippides*)

(*Iamb-log.*) In the deep of our land, 'tis said, || a village from out the woods. (*Ivàn Ivànovitch*)

Lines of seven feet:

(*Troch-log.*) Hated or feared the more,— who knows? || — the genuine wild-beast breed (*Halbert and Hob*)

(*Iamb-log.*) My grandfather says he remembers he saw, || when a youngster long ago,
On a bright May day, a strange old man, || with a beard as white as snow. (*Martin Relph*)

CHAPTER III.

THE STROPHE-FORMS.

In the preceding chapter we have examined the individual lines of Browning's poetry, and have seen how the greatest variety possible in their complex structure may be reduced to a system, by considering their elemental structure. It is proposed to do the same for the strophes, of which there is also a very great variety. The strophe is a more complex unity than the line; and, with Browning, it may be said to be the primary unit; for the habitual use of enjambement, even in his longer lines, seems to make it apparent that he did not treat the line as a unit to be considered independently of the strophe.

The most important elements of the strophe are the *line* (or *verse*) and *rhyme*. By the structure of the strophe, whether corresponding in internal structure, or length; or differing in both or either, a special rhythm is imparted to the strophe-form, which marks it out as individual and distinct in kind. The rhymes, by their arrangement, bind the strophe together more or less closely, according as they are made more or less prominent. Besides these two combining and fusing agencies there is another, which gives to the strophe its toning — *alliteration*. It is frequently very important in Browning's poetry, and its elusive effects are scarcely ever absent.

Thus the structure of the strophe is very complex; and the success to which any poet attains in its use is one of the highest tests of his power. The real strophe must be a structural unit, and not a merely mechanical group of verses. The poet must have breathed into it the breath of life, and the whole must be an organism, in which every

member has its special function and which is quick with "the mystery of vital movement." This test as a poet Browning stands most admirably. Few English poets show a greater variety of strophe-forms; and among all his strophes there is scarcely one which is merely a succession of verses. In almost every instance the sympathetic reader must be aware of the presence of an informing life, out of which the form has inevitably grown.

There are three classes of strophe-form in Browning:

I. Regular Forms. Those which are members of a series of uniform groups of lines.

II. Irregular Forms. Those which perform all the functions of a strophe, but which are individual in their structure.

III. Those which are in themselves complete poems.

Under each of these three divisions the strophes will be classified according to the number of lines of (a) equal, (b) of unequal length.

I. REGULAR FORMS.

Strophes of two lines.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Four feet:

The Boy and the Angel. The short and fitful strophes are most appropriate to the story of the humble worshipper of God.

> Morning, evening, noon and night,
> "Praise God!" sang Theocrite.
>
> Then to his poor trade he turned,
> Whereby the daily meal was earned.
>
> Hard he laboured, long and well;
> O'er his work the boy's curl fell.
>
> But ever, at each period,
> He stopped and sang, "Praise God."

(2) Five feet:

The iambic pentapody in rhyming couplets is the form of *Sordello*. It is handled with the same freedom as is seen in the work of Marlowe; and, later, in Shelley and Keats. As contrasted with the manner of Pope, enjambement is very frequent, which gives to the verse a more flowing, and less epigrammatic, effect. The place of the caesura varies within wide limits in Browning's heroic couplets, which imparts to the verse a freedom of movement similar to that of blank verse.

—— His darling stoops
With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troops
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent
Utterly with thee, its shy element
Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear.
Still, what if I approach the august sphere
Named now with only one name, disentwine
That under-current soft and argentine
From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixed with glass
In John's transcendent vision,— launch once more
That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore
Where glutted hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume —
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
Into a darkness quieted by hope;
Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
In gracious twilight where his chosen lie. (*Book I.*)

In this extract the rhyme does not interfere with the onward movement of the verse; the couplet-structure being weakened by the enjambement in the first part. But the function of the couplet is emphasized in the last six lines. The pauses are not in the interior of the line, but at the end; and each couplet is as isolated and distinct as the Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, which they describe.

Saul is a splendid example of a five-foot anapaestic rhythm, where the young enthusiasm of the prophet is heard in the impetuous sweep of the verse:

As I sang,—"Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! The leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the sleep in the dried river channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well."

(3) Six feet:

'Twas Bedford special Assize, one daft Midsummer's day:
A broiling blasting June,—was never its like, men say.
—(*Ned Bratts.*)

'Tis the regular pad of the wolves in pursuit of the lives in the sledge!
An army they are: close-packed they press like the thrust of a wedge:
They increase as they hunt: for I see, through the pine-trunks ranged each side,
Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider and still more wide
The four-footed steady advance. The foremost none may pass:
They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye—green-glowing brass.
(*Ivàn Ivànovitch.*)

(4) Eight feet:

The long trochaic measure of *La Saisaiz* is the fit instrument for the carrying on of the keen questionings on life and immortality.

"Crowned by prose and verse; and wielding, with Wit's bauble, Learning's rod. . ."
Well? Why he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God.

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two, and three feet,

Rhyme-scheme. $\begin{matrix} a & a \\ 3 & 2 \end{matrix}$

Of the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind. (*Instans Tyrannus.*)

After is similar.

(2) Two and six feet:

a a
6 2 *Love Among the Ruins.*

Where the quiet colored end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles,
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop.

The effect of the short line is to impart a dreamy and pensive tone to the verse, by its recurring tinkle. The verse admirably gives the spirit of the poem. This poem shows a double system of strophe formation: the two-line strophe formed by the rhyme, and the larger group of twelve lines, which represents the stages of the thought and feeling.

STROPHES OF THREE LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Four feet:

a b a *The Statue and the Bust.* (Terza Rima.)

There's a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell, etc.

(2) Five feet:

a a a *Epilogue to 'Dramatis Personæ,'* (Third Speaker.)

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows!

This is a closely-knit strophe; the thrice-repeated rhyme making the close very emphatic, as befits the utterance of one who proclaims the final truth.

a b a *Doctor —.* The *terza rima* of Dante. It is grotesquely used in this poem, and is as wilful in form as is the subject.

A Rabbi told me: on the day allowed
Satan for carping at God's rule, he came,
Fresh from our earth, to brave the angel crowd....

With this, contrast the *terza rima* of *Jochanan Hakkadosh.*

He lay a-dying, scholars, — awe-struck, dumb
Throughout the night-watch, — roused themselves and spoke
One to the other: "Ere death's touch benumb

His active sense, — while yet 'neath Reason's yoke
Obedient toils his tongue, — befits we claim
The fruit of long experience, bid this oak....

(3) Seven feet:

a a a *Lyric to 'Shah Abbas.'*

You groped your way across my room i' the drear dark dread of night;
At each fresh step a stumble was; but once your lamp alight,
Easy and plain you walked again: so soon all wrong grew right!

(4) Eight feet.

a a a *Lyric to 'The Family.'*

Man I am and man would be, Love — merest man and nothing more.
Bid me seem no other! Eagles boast of pinions — let them soar!
I may put forth angel's plumage, once unmanned, but not before.

(*b Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Six and seven feet:

a a a
6 7 6 *Lyric to 'The Melon-Seller.'*

Wish no word unspoken, want no look away!
What if words were but mistake, and looks — too sudden, say!
Be unjust for once, Love! Bear it — well I may!

STROPHES OF FOUR LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Two feet:

a b a b. This form does not occur; but the eight-line strophe of *Pisgah-Sights* is made up of two strophes of this form.

Over the ball of it,
Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
Life there, outlying!

(2) Three feet:

a b a b. **Ben Karshook's Wisdom.*[1]

"Would a man escape the rod?"
Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,
"See that he turn to God
The day before his death."

Similar in rhyme-scheme, but of a different rhythm, are *The Twins* and *Youth and Art.*

a b c d. *Donald.*

"Will you hear my story also,
—Huge sport, brave adventure in plenty?"
The boys were a band from Oxford,
The oldest of whom was twenty.

(3) Four feet:

a b a b. *Memorabilia.* Made up of two four-foot strophes of two lines each.

a a b b. *The Laboratory,* Two couplets of trochaic-logaoedic rhythm.

Now that I, tying my glass mask tightly,
May gaze through these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

a b c b. *May and Death.* The internal rhyme in the third line has a plaintive effect.

I wish that when you died last May,
Charles, there had died along with you
Three parts of spring's delightful things,
Ay, and, for me, the fourth part too.

(4) Five feet:

a b a b *Pictor Ignotus.* The regular "iambic quatrain."

Fears and Scruples is in trochaic quatrains, the second and fourth lines of which are catalectic, having an emphatic close. It has a singularly haunting melody.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent he would know I owed him duty;
Present he would find me at his side.

---

1 Not included in the final London edition of the collected works. It is inserted here, as showing a new form. Such forms will be marked with an asterisk.

(5) Six feet:

a a b b. *Solomon and Balkis* is logaoedic, and *Before* is an example of the trochaic. Both are made up of two couplets, examples of which have been given among the two-line strophes.

(6) Seven feet:

a a a a. *Martin Relph* (First Strophe).

My grandfather says he remembers he saw, when a youngster long ago,
On a bright May-day, a strange old man, with a beard as white as snow,
Stand on the hill outside our town like a monument of woe,
And, striking his bare bald head the while, sob out the reason — so!

The remainder is in strophes, a a b b, that is, two couplets succeeding each other.

(7) Eight feet:

a a b b. This strophe is made up of two eight-foot couplets. e. g. *Cristina.*

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two and three feet:

a b a b
3 2 3 2 *A Woman's Last Word.*

Let's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
— Only sleep!

(2) Two and four feet:

a b a b
4 2 4 2 *Prospice.* A finely vigorous strophe.

Fear death?— to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place. . . .

a b b a
4 2 2 4 *A Pretty Woman.*

That fawn-skin-dappled hair of hers,
And the blue eye
Dear and dewy
And that infantine fresh air of hers.

(3) Three and four feet:

a b a b
4 3 4 3 *The Lost Mistress.*

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes?
Hark, 'tis the sparrow's good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

With this, contrast the vigor of the iambic-logaoedic movement of *Muckle-Mouthed Meg.*

Frowned the Laird on the Lord: "So, red-handed I catch thee?
Death-doomed by our Law of the Border!
We've a gallows outside and a chiel to dispatch thee:
Who trespasses — hangs: all's in order."

STROPHES OF FIVE LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Three feet.

a b a b a *Reverie.*

I know there shall dawn a day
—Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
That Power comes full in play?

a b b a a *Mesmerism.*

All I believed is true!
I am able yet
All I want, to get
By a method as strange as new.
Dare I trust the same to you?

So *Bad Dreams*, and *Epilogue to 'Dramatis Personæ.'*

(2) Four feet:

a b a b a *A Serenade at the Villa.*

Oh how dark your villa was
Windows fast and obdurate!
How the garden grudged me grass
Where I stood — the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass!

a b a b b *Porphyria's Lover.*

The rain set early in to-night,
  The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
  I listened with heart fit to break.

As contrasted with this,—the compressed iambic measure,—the trochaic-logaoedic measure of the *Prologue to 'Parleyings,'* though of the same rhyme-scheme and number of feet, gives an entirely different movement.

Flame at the foot-fall, Parnassus! Apollo,
  Breaking ablaze on thy topmost peak,
Burns thence, down to the depths—dread hollow—
  Haunt of the Dire Ones. Haste! They wreak
Wrath on Admetus whose respite I seek.

a b a a b This form occurs in the *Lyric* to *'A Pillar at Sebzevar.'*

a a b b a This form is made up of two couplets, with the addition of a line repeating the first rhyme, which binds the strophe together. Used in *Tray.*

a b c c a *Dis Aliter Visum.*

Stop, let me have the truth of that!
  Is that all true? I say the day
Ten years ago when both of us
  Met on a morning, friends—as thus
We meet this evening, friends or what?

So *James Lee's Wife,* ix.

(b) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Three and four feet.

a b a b a
3 3 4 4 3 *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.* Stanza 22 gives the effect of this form. The effect of the last line is very suitable to the subject.

Is it your moral of life?
  Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
  Death ending all with a knife?

a b a b a
4 4 4 4 3 *By the Fireside.* A very beautiful strophe, to which the iambic-logaoedic movement contributes much, by combining the lightsome anapaest and the more quietly moving iamb — a fit instrument for the expression of the chastened joy of "the love of wedded souls." The short line at the end gives compactness to the form, which makes it exquisitely fitted for the pictures in the poem.

A turn and we stand in the heart of things;
The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Through the ravage some torrent brings!

Two in the Campagna has the same rhyme-scheme, but the iambic lines give an entirely different toning to the whole. So *Gold Hair.* With both, contrast *Popularity.* .

a b a a b
4 3 4 4 3 *James Lee's Wife*, iv. The emphasizing power of rhyme is shown in the fourth line, which repeats the rhyme for the third time; and in this line the most emphatic declaration is made. The next line takes up the less emphasized rhyme, and carries the strophe forward to a gentle close.

I will be quiet and talk with you,
And reason why you are wrong.
You wanted my love — is that much true?
And so I did love, so I do:
What has come of it all along?

(2) Three, four and five feet.

a b a b a
5 5 5 4 3 — *James Lee's Wife*, vi. The gradual shortening in the last two lines forms a beautiful climax, the fitness of which is seen in the example.

Only for man, how bitter not to grave
On his soul's hand's palms one fair, good wise thing
Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's wave;
While time first washes — ah the sting!—
O'er all he'd sink to save.

(3) Three and five feet.

a a a b b
5 5 5 5 3 *Lyric to 'Cherries.'* The unexpected short line gives a sudden and jocose ending, suitable to the determination to "make verse."

STROPHES OF SIX LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Four feet.

a a b b c c Three couplets. *Song in 'Pippa Passes'* (Iambic); *The Ride from Ghent to Aix* (Anapaestic); *Marching Along* (Troch-log).

a b a b c c *Nationality in Drinks* (Strophes 1 and 2). A quatrain and a couplet.

a b a c b a *The Worst of It.*

> Would it were I had been false, not you!
> I that am nothing, not you that are all:
> I never the worse for a touch or two
> On my speckled hide; not you the pride
> Of the day, my swan, that a fleck's first fall
> On her wonder of white must unswan, undo!

Note the animating touch of the internal rhyme in the fourth line; and note also the perfection of the periodic structure in the beautiful repetition of the first rhyme in the final line.

a b c c b a *Meeting at Night*, and *In a Gondola*, (*She speaks*, 2). The arrangement of the rhymes gives greater intensity to the middle of the strophe, with a more flowing close.

(2) Five feet.

a b b a a b *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.* The rhyme-emphasis is distributed pretty evenly through the strophe, with a lightening at the end. The repetition of the two rhymes unites the strophes closely, and at the same time gives the reader a haunting sense of the dread mysteries which the Childe saw on his wonderful journey.

Better this present than a past like that;
Back therefore to my darkening path again!
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

a b c a b c *James Lee's Wife*, vii. This strophe is the concluding part of the Italian sonnet-form.

a a b c c b *Any Wife to Any Husband.* The b–rhyme fuses the group into one.

(3) Six feet.

a b c a b c *Muléykeh*, Two strophes of three lines, united in a more complex unity.

(4) Eight feet.

a a b b c c *Mertoun's Song in 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.'* The combination of three long, flowing couplets makes a fine strophe.

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two, three and four feet.

a b a b c c
2 2 2 4 4 3 *James Lee's Wife*, v.

I leaned on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock:
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

The abrupt and jagged movement of this strophe is due to the fact that the lines corresponding in rhyme do not correspond in length. Thus, line 4 is double the length of line 2, and line 5 has one foot more than line 6. The character of many strophe-forms arises out of departures from the rule that only similar lines should rhyme. It is seldom, however, that two so striking departures are made in one of six short verses. Here they are justified, as an expression of the despair of the woman from whose life the glory of love has flown.

(2) Three and four feet:

a a b b c c
3 3 4 4 4 3 *Adam, Lilith and Eve.*

a b a b c c
3 3 3 4 4 4 *Which?*

a a a a b b
4 4 4 4 4 3 *In a Gondola* (*Still He Muses*).

a b c a b c
4 4 4 4 4 3 *Ponte Dell' Angelo, Venice.*

a b a b c c
4 3 4 4 4 4 *Epilogue to 'The Two Poets of Croisic.'*

The foregoing examples represent almost all combinations of the three and four foot lines.

(3) Three, five and six feet:

a a b c c b
3 3 5 3 3 6 *Rabbi Ben Ezra.* A peculiarly fit strophe to enshrine the musings of the aged Teacher. The body of the strophe contains the arguments of the Rabbi, and the long Alexandrine gives the conclusions, with a fine effect.

(4) Six and seven feet:

a b c a b c
6 6 6 6 6 7 *Lyric to 'Two Camels.'* Two six-foot triplets, with a seven-foot line substituted in the last. This calls the attention to the unity of the strophe.

STROPHES OF SEVEN LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Two feet:

a b a b c b c *James Lee's Wife*, i. Three couplets joined by the fifth line, which introduces the third rhyme. The fitness of these short spasmodic lines, with the dead stop at the close, to express the woman's numb despair, must be felt by all who have any feeling for poetic form.

Ah, Love, but a day
  And the world has changed!
The sun's away,
  And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
  And the sky's deranged;
Summer has stopped.

(2) Three feet:

a a b b a a a *A Lover's Quarrel.*

(3) Four feet:

a b a b c c c *Arcades Ambo.*

a b c c d d d *In Three Days.*

(4) Five feet:

a b a b a b b *Poem at the end of 'Daniel Bartoli.'*

a b a b c c a *The Guardian Angel.* This, as do the foregoing six and seven-line strophes, shows with what skill the combinations of couplets, triplets, quatrains, and such lesser units, are fused into the larger organism. This strophe, made up of a quatrain, a couplet, and a line repeating the rhyme of the first is a triumphant example of a complex stanza having a true poetic unity.

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
  I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
  After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

(b) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two and four feet:

a b a b c c a
4 2 4 2 4 4 4 *James Lee's Wife*, iii.

The long lines are anapaestic, and the short lines trochaic; which gives the strophe a peculiar rhythm.

The swallow has set her six young on the rail,
  And looks seaward:
The water's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale

To the leeward,—
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.
"Good fortune departs, and disaster's behind," —
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail!

a b a b c c d
4 4 4 4 4 4 2 *A Pearl, A Girl.*

(2) Two, three and four feet:

a b b a c c a
2 4 3 4 4 4 4 *In a Gondola.*

(3) Three and four feet:

a b a b b a a
3 3 3 3 3 4 4 *Misconceptions.* The nature of this strophe will be seen from the rhyme-scheme.

(4) Four and five feet:

a b a b b c c
5 5 5 5 5 5 4 *Lyric to 'A Bean-Stripe.'*

STROPHES OF EIGHT LINES.

(a) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Two feet:

a b a b c d c d *Pisgah-Sights.*

(2) Four feet:

a b a b c d c d Many poems have this form: *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* (Troch.), *Evelyn Hope* (Troch-log), *Old Pictures in Florence* (Iamb-log), *Filippo Baldinucci* (Iamb) are examples.

a b b b a c c c *Cristina and Mondaleschi.*

a b a b b c c c *Song in 'Paracelsus,'* ("*Heap cassia, etc.*")

(3) Five feet:

a b a b a b c c *The Two Poets of Croisic.*

(4) Six feet:

a b a b c d c d *Abt Vogler.* The union of the two four-line strophes is so complete as to produce the perfect and majestic organ-tones of this poem. The *Epilogue to 'Fifine'* is of the same form, but is entirely different in rhythm.

a b c d d c a b *Pheidippides.*

(b) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two and four feet:

a b c d d a b c
2 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 *Love in A Life.*

a b a c c d d b
4 2 4 2 2 4 4 2 *James Lee's Wife,* ii.

(2) Two, three and four feet:

a a a b b b c c
2 2 4 2 2 4 4 3 *In A Gondola* (*He Sings, 3*) Two triplets and one couplet.

a b c a d b c d
3 2 4 2 3 2 4 2 *In A Year.* Two groups, united by the b-rhyme.

(3) Three and four feet:

a b a b c d c d
4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 *Incident of the French Camp.*

a b c c c b a a
3 4 4 4 4 4 4 3 *Epilogue to 'Pacchiarotto'*

a b b a c d d c
4 4 4 4 4 4 4 3 *Respectability.*

(4) Six, seven and eight feet:

a b a c d b d c
6 8 6 7 6 8 6 7 *Pietro of Abano.*

STROPHES OF NINE LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Four feet:

a b a b c d c d d *Apparent Failure.*

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two, three, four, five and six feet:

a b a b a c d c d
5 2 5 5 6 3 4 4 3 *'Pippa'* (*'Give her but the least excuse'*)

(2) Three and four feet:

a b c c b a d d a
3 3 4 4 4 4 4 4 3 *Natural Magic.*

STROPHES OF TEN LINES.

Only one poem, *Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli,* is written in this strophe. The scheme is a b a b c c d d e e / 3 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 3.

STROPHES OF ELEVEN LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

Four feet: a a b b c d d e e e c *The Last Ride Together.*

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

Two and four feet: *Another Way of Love* a b c d d a b c / 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

e e e
4 4 4.

STROPHES OF TWELVE LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

Four feet: a b a b c c d d e f e f *Bad Dreams III.*

a b a b c d e f e f c d *Too Late.*

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two and six feet: a a b b c c d d e e f f / 6 2 6 2 6 2 6 2 6 2 6 2 *Love Among*

the Ruins. This poem has been noticed in the two-line strophes, as these large groups are logical, rather than constructive.

(2) Three and four feet:

a b a b c d c d e f e f
3 3 4 3 3 3 4 3 3 3 4 3 *Flute Music.*

Made up of three four-line strophes, the third line of which is longer than the others by one foot. It has a very beautiful cadence.

STROPHES OF FOURTEEN LINES.

Five feet: abba abba cd cd cd "*Moses the Meek.*" This is a sonnet-form of an approved Italian type.

STROPHES OF SIXTEEN LINES.

One example only, with lines of four feet.

a b a b c d e d f g h g k l m l *The Lost Leader.* Despite its length, the strophe is an organic unity. The trochaic-logaoedic movement is very fine.

STROPES OF TWENTY LINES.

a b a b c d c d e f e f g h g h k l k l. This form occurs in *Bifurcation.* The concluding couplet of the poem has no connection with the strophes.

STROPHES OF TWENTY-TWO LINES.

(1) One and four feet:

a b c d e e d f g g f h k h k l m l m a b c. *Life in a Love.*
1 1 1 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 1 1 1.

(2) Two, three and four feet:

a b a b a c d c d d c c e f f e g g h h h h *Never the Time and the Place.*
3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 4 2

A few of Browning's strophes, which come under this first head of Regular Strophes, have a place by themselves. They are those having a chorus, or refrain.

1. *Boot and Saddle.* Three four-foot anapaestic lines, rhyming a a a, with a refrain of the same length and rhyme.

2. *Marching Along.* Four trochaic-logaoedic lines of four feet, rhyming a a b b, with refrain of two lines similar to those of the strophe, and rhyming c c.

3. *Give A Rouse.* Four four-foot iamb-log. lines, rhyming a b a b. The refrain is three similar lines, rhyming c c c, and a fourth line of one foot, introducing the new rhyme d. The poem opens with the refrain.

4. *Rosny.* Five four-foot lines, rhyming a a b a b, with one refrain ("Clara, Clara!") after the first line, and a second ("Rosny, Rosny!") after the fifth.

(5) *In a Gondola,* (*He Sings, 2.*) Five four-foot lines, rhyming a b a b c, to which the refrain of two feet is added, carrying on the rhyme c.

II. IRREGULAR FORMS.

Thus far only those strophes have been dealt with which are members of a uniform series. The second class of strophes is made up of those forms which are individual in their structure, while they perform the functions of strophes. For the most part these are of a complex structure and cannot be described by a simple formula, like the regular strophes. They may be described as "free musical paragraphs," taking on forms in accordance with the dictates of the thought and feeling which dominate them and give them vitality. Browning makes a free use of this principle of strophe-formation, and some of his most admired poetry is in this form.

Lines of four feet: This is shown well in the Song which Aprile sings in *Paracelsus;* and a triumphant example is found in the same poem — Paracelsus' song of the men "who proudly clung to their first fault and withered in their pride." The opening has a splendid vigor:

Over the seas our galleys went,
With cleaving prows in order brave
To a speeding wind and a bounding wave,
A gallant armament;

and the verse arranges itself into all varieties of groups, to express the changing moods of the mistaken sailors. Their despair at the last is mirrored in the monosyllables:

Yet we called out — "Depart!
Our gifts once given must here abide.
Our work is done; we have no heart
To mar our work,"— we cried.

Christmas Eve and *Easter Day* are chiefly in couplets; but the verse is ever transforming itself into other forms. The infinite variety which this verse may assume is seen in *Waring*, *James Lee's Wife*, viii, *A Likeness*, *Pacchiarotto*, *De Gustibus*, the last strophe of *In Three Days*, and *The Flight of the Duchess*. Although all these are written in four-foot lines, they differ from each other most widely. On the one hand we have the grotesque verse of *Pacchiarotto*, and on the other the faultless music of the Gipsy's incantation in *The Flight of the Duchess*. In the use of this four-foot line alone, Browning shows the greatest metrical power. Only genius could have produced such varied notes from so simple an instrument.

The Prologue to *Pippa Passes* is a good example, on a large scale, of the possibilities of the irregular strophe-form. The first twelve lines describe the dawning of day. Beginning with a catalectic trochaic line (Day), like the single first ray of the sunrise, the strophe swells into a magnificent music, until, like the sun, it "Flickered in bounds, grew gold, and overflowed the world." The rest of the prologue alternates between a short, tripping measure, and a long, flowing five-foot measure, in correspondence with the wilful fits of gaiety and melancholy of the little, prattling silk-winding girl. Towards the end, the song, "All service ranks the same with God", comes in with a beauti-

ful and solemnizing effect. The Epilogue is the innocent prattle of the child who is unconscious of the great human tragedy which has shadowed her one holiday.

In A Gondola is partly made up of regular strophes, which have been noted in the proper place; but the remainder of the poem is made up of the free strophe. The opening is pure music:

> I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
> In this my singing.
> For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;
> The very night is clinging
> Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
> Above me, whence thy face
> May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

The ending of the poem is fine, and, like this strophe, ends with an alexandrine.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin and *Hervé Riel* are chiefly in four-foot lines, but other lines are introduced. *Home Thoughts from Abroad* is in two strophes of individual structure. The first shows the finest poetic sense. It opens with a beautiful lyric burst:

> Oh, to be in England.

The last line of the strophe ("In England — now!") is the wish which arises as the poet's mind dwells on the picture of the chaffinch on the swaying orchard bough, and suggests the scene in the most subtly artistic manner.

Five feet:

Parleyings With Certain People is a series of poems written in the five-foot measure; and there is a very great variety in the grouping of the lines. The couplet and the quatrain are the prevailing forms, but these are continually broken in upon by other arrangements. Many of these strophes are very magnificent; and, as examples, sections viii to xii of *Gerard de Lairesse* may be mentioned. They describe the course of a day, and the character of the verse changes as the day changes — the laugh of morning, the sun-smitten noon, and the stormy darkness.

Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli, and *A Face* are similar in form.

Six feet:

Pheidippides (Strophe 8). This is a unique form, $\begin{matrix} a\ b\ c\ d\ d\ a\ b \\ 6\ 6\ 6\ 6\ 6\ 7\ 6 \end{matrix}$

Ixion is in couplets, of which the second line is catalectic at the caesura and at the end. As suggested by Mrs. Orr, it imitates the turning of the wheel on which Ixion is bound. It is a reproduction of the classical elegiac couplet.

III. POEM-STROPHES.

STROPHES OF FOUR LINES.

(1) Four feet: a b b a *Morning.*

STROPHES OF SEVEN LINES.

Eight feet: a a a a a a a *Home Thoughts from the Sea.*

STROPHES OF EIGHT LINES.

(1) Two feet: a b c d a b c d *Pippa,* (*"The year's at the Spring."*)

(2) Five feet: a a a b c c c b *Deaf and Dumb.*
a a b c c b d d *Eurydice to Orpheus.*

STROPHES OF NINE LINES.

Two feet: a b a b c b c b b *Earth's Immortalities* (*Love.*).

STROPHES OF ELEVEN LINES.

Two and three feet:
a b a b a b c b b b c *Prologue to "Dramatic Idyls,"* (II.).

STROPHES OF THIRTEEN LINES.

Two and four feet:

$\begin{matrix} a\ b\ a\ b\ c\ d\ c\ d\ d\ e\ f\ e\ f \\ 2\ 2\ 2\ 2\ 2\ 2\ 2\ 2\ 4\ 4\ 4\ 4\ 4 \end{matrix}$ *My Star.*

STROPES OF FOURTEEN LINES.

(1) Four feet: a b b c a c d e d e f g g f *Now.*

(2) Five feet: No sonnet is included in the London edition.

* *Helen's Tower* follows the Italian model — abba abba cde cde.

* *Why I Am a Liberal* is abba abba cd cd cd; and * *Shakespeare* is abba abba cd cd dc.

*Not in the collective London edition.

STROPHES OF FIFTEEN LINES.

(*a*) *Lines of equal length.*

(1) Five feet: abba abba cdd cdd c *The Founder of the Feast.* A sonnet-form with an additional line.

(*b*) *Lines of unequal length.*

(1) Two and four feet:

a b b a c c d d d e e f g f g g
2 2 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 4 2 2 2 2 2 *Wanting is—What?*

STROPHES OF SIXTEEN LINES.

Three, four and five feet:

a a b b c c b d d d e e f f g g *Pippa Passes.* (*Song,* '*Over-*
4 4 4 4 4 4 3 4 4 4 3 4 4 5 5 3 *head the tree-tops.*')

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLANK VERSE.

The evolution of blank verse as a form of expression marks the highest triumph of English poetical genius. The history of the evolution of this complex and varying form is in essence the history of English poetry. This form is seen in germ in the Anglo-Saxon verse; and in Chaucer the pentapody appears in rhyming coup ets, which he used in his stories with marvellous power. But the English Renaissance as mirrored in the drama, demanded a yet freer and more flexible instrument for the expression of its manifold activities. It required a verse which was suited to the dialogue of real men and women, a verse which would not interrupt the movement of thought from line to line by any recurring rhyme or strophe, but which would give all the freedom of prose. The needed form was evolved in due time, and the result was the blank verse of Marlowe and of Shakespeare.

In a later age Milton perceived the great superiority of Shakespeare's blank verse, for his heroic poem, over the rhyming couplet. The couplet, he says, has been a hindrance to the poets of his time, and used by force of custom, "much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse, than else they would have expressed them." And he openly declared his purpose to recover for heroic poetry its "ancient liberty" by rejecting rhyme and making use of a verse "which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another." He fulfilled his purpose so nobly that his verse is a new species, distinct from the dramatic blank verse in its studied dignity and stateliness.

In our own time blank verse has been used with great power — Tennyson and Arnold continuing the Miltonic tradition in their epic poems, and Browning continuing the tradition of the Elizabethan dramatists. In any comparison of Browning's and Tennyson's verse this fact must be kept in mind, and any judgment of the one founded on standards derived from the other must of necessity be false. The blank verses of these poets are distinct in kind, and written with a different purpose. Each is admirably adapted to its purpose, and to praise or blame the one by the other is a mistaken method. We cannot wonder that the verse in which the villain Guido proffers his defense differs so widely from the verse of the "Morte d'Arthur." The same kind of verse could not express the action in the court of justice, with all its conflicting passions and lies, and that in the other scene in the chapel nigh the field, wherein the deeply-wounded king lay dying, while "on one side lay the ocean, and on one lay a great water, and the moon was full." The turbulence of the one and the peace of the other demand media of expression entirely different in kind.

In all blank verse the aim of the poet is to express, not a purely lyric emotion, but a complete fusion of thought and emotion in such a way as to present both with equal truth. What is needed for this purpose is a verse which will carry on the thought consecutively with all the freedom of prose, and which, at the same time, will retain the harmony and rhythm necessary to express the feeling and emotion. The structure of blank verse is very free, the only feature which can be called conventional being the pentapody line. There is no set form of strophes, though this form of verse has strophes, as all verse must, in its nature, have. But the supreme excellence of blank verse is that it has freed itself of all conventionality of strophe-form, its form being determined from moment to moment, according to the nature of the thought and feeling. The strophes are thus wholly organic, and do not approach the

danger of becoming merely artificial groups of lines — a danger from which the set strophe is frequently rescued only by supreme metrical genius. Each phase of thought and emotion takes its own form, consisting of few or many lines according to the nature of the impelling thought or emotion. In the words of Milton, the "true musical delight" of poetry is secured by "the sense being *variously* drawn out from one verse into another."

In the third chapter we have said that the strophe is to be regarded as the primary unit in the form of poetry; as the poet does not regard the less complex units as things to be considered apart from the organism of which they are members. In no form of poetry is this more clearly seen than in blank verse; and it will be found that the best blank verse — that is, the blank verse in which are shown peculiar excellences as the form for the expression of the fusion of thought and emotion — is not that in which the separate lines stand out from the body of the poetry; but that in which the beauty and significance of the lesser units are not felt separately and by themselves, but only in relation to the larger wholes, from which they derive their meaning and to which they give their charm. Therefore, it is from the point of view of the strophe that we must approach the blank verse of any poet, if we are to see its characteristic excellences. Some poets have, it is true, a greater facility than others of condensing their thoughts into short forms — of polishing and refining, until, as in Virgil, "all the charm of all the muses often flowers in a lonely word." Among our English poets there is none who possesses this power in a higher degree than the one who made this criticism of Virgil. Tennyson stands supreme in the power of flashing out from many a golden phrase all the chosen coin of fancy. And, in his blank verse, he is contained within the limits of a line more than any other master of this form. The history of Shakespeare's growth is his growing freedom from the single line into the larger space of the

paragraph or strophe. His best later poetry can be justfied and appreciated only by regarding all in relation to the groups of lines in which the single lines occur. In the periodic structure of Milton's verse we must wait until we reach the final strain before the harmonies are resolved, and each member of the whole takes its proper place and function. And, in Browning, the principle of strophe formation must never be lost sight of. In his verse as in Milton's, the sense is "*variously* drawn out from verse to verse;" and these two poets, as are all poets, are distinguished from each other by the differences in the method by which this is accomplished. The lines in Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson and Browning, which have fallen beneath the censure of the critics as 'barbarous' and 'formless' can be appreciated and explained only by being regarded, not in isolation, but as the members of the period or strophe, working together to one common and harmonious end.

While the excellence of Browning's blank verse has been recognized in some quarters, the dramatic character, which should be the medium of expression for poems "always dramatic in principle," is denied him. This view of his poetry is maintained with great ability by Prof. Walker. "In a sense," he says, "it may be said that a dramatist need not have a style of his own at all; but if he escapes this obligation he incurs a more onerous one, he must have not one style, but twenty. This is where Browning fails. He *has* a style of his own, a style for good or evil conspicuous for its strongly marked traits; and this he carries with him through all his dramas and in the delineation of all his characters."[1]

What Prof. Walker goes on to say in support of his thesis hardly detracts from the dramatic character of Browning's verse. The mark of Shakespeare is so plainly imprinted upon his verse that its dramatic character — the changes it undergoes to suit itself to the characters — is

[1] *The Greater Victorian Poets*, p. 191.

not taken into the slightest account in determining the chronology of the plays by the ordinary verse tests. Over and above the variations of the verse in its dramatic character, there remains intact the permanent character arising out of the personality of the artist. Every author, even the most dramatic, has his style, his "singing clothes," "fashioning his phrases upon his own individuality, and speaking as if he were making a language thus, for the first time, under those 'purple eyes' of the muse, which tinted every syllable as it was uttered, with a separate benediction."[1] Prof. Walker is right in so far as it is true that the individual style is more persistently present with some poets than with others. It certainly is with Browning more than with Shakespeare. But this fact does not by any means render invalid the contention that Browning's verse is the most dramatic blank verse of the century, and that it ranks high among the best dramatic verse in the language. Take, for example, *Cleon*, the utterance of a learned and highly cultured Greek, and *Caliban*, in which the half-beast gives his ideas of God. On the one hand we have the smoothly flowing verse, with its beauties everywhere like the isles of Greece, "sprinkled lily on lily"; and on the other we have the verse which cannot flow. Caliban's speech is too primitive for that, and he must speak in monosyllabic verse. From both of these the verse of *A Death in the Desert* differs in its meditativeness and repose. But, to take our examples from *The Ring and the Book*, which is Browning's supreme effort, a great and organic difference is to be seen in the general character and atmosphere of the several books; and to this the verse, by its dramatic character, is in no slight degree a contributor. Take, for example, *Half Rome* and *The Other Half Rome*,— books which might seem to call for little distinct characterization because of the unimportance of the

[1] Mrs. Browning, quoted in Nicoll's *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. I.

speakers. The speaker in *Half Rome* is a married man who is jealous of his wife, and so naturally takes sides with Guido, the husband and murderer. He knows women, he says, facts are facts, the wife misbehaved, and Guido did right to kill such a one, and to "revenge his own wrong like a gentleman." In the verse there is no ornament which is incompatible with a poetic interpretation of the low views of life represented by him. The verse of *The Other Half Rome*, in which a chivalrous bachelor speaks, is far different. His mind does not dwell on the so-called "facts" of the case. He has had a vision of something higher; and his eyes are raised to

> Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
> And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
> And, under the white hospital array,
> A flower-like body,

and he sees all in relation to her. These, the opening lines of the book, give its whole atmosphere; and it is distinguished by its frequent beautiful imagery, especially of the flowers. The verse is singularly sweet.

We have taken these two books as examples of what might be done in differentiating the verse of the several books. Thus, the differences between the verse of the four chief characters -- Guido, Pompilia, Caponsacchi and the Pope -- are easily seen at least in their most general characteristics. Nearly every one would also see differences between the verses of the Pope and of the Lawyers, even if no distinction were discoverable between those of the Lawyers themselves; but a study would certainly reveal differences. It is not proposed, however, to go over the whole ground in this essay. Though these differences, which are felt as impressions, must be the guide when any attempt is made to formulate them, we shall attempt to study the verse in a more intensive manner. We shall select the books of the most important characters, and in which characterization is more clearly called for: Guido's

first and second monologues (Books V. and XI.), *Pompilia*, *Caponsacchi*, and *The Pope*. By this method of study it will be possible to attain greater exactness of results than by one requiring a more general examination. On the other hand it may be said that the characteristics of the blank verse, which are noted in this chapter, were derived from a careful study, not only of *The Ring and the Book*, but of the whole body of the poet's blank verse. The passages particularly examined in this chapter simply present in definite shape the general character of the verse in its manifold forms. So far as the results go, they have in every case confirmed opinions formed from the more general, and what some would perhaps call the more æsthetic, method of criticism.[1]

I. Among the diverse judgments passed on Browning's blank verse, one of the most common is that of *vigor;* and, indeed, this quality of vigorous flow is the most striking of all the characteristics which mark it as peculiar and individual. This quality is to be traced to the fact that Browning has constructed his verse consistently in periods, or strophes. These strophes are, as a rule, well defined and closely fused together into compact wholes; although they may vary in length from one or two lines to over twenty. As in all careful art, these differences are not due to any caprice; but are wholly organic, and are the outward expression of the contriving spirit within. An examination shows that the differences in length of these strophes are very dramatic, suiting themselves most admirably to the nature of the thought and emotion of the character in whose mouth the verse is placed. Thus the nature of the strophe which prevails in the several books differs as widely as the characters. Those in the first monologue of Guido average seventeen lines, and in the last, ten lines.

[1] The passages selected for more particular examination are: Book V, *Count Guido Franceschini*, lines 292–412; Book VI, *Guiseppe Caponsacchi*, lines 937–1198; Book VII, *Pompilia*, lines 1383–1527; Book X, *The Pope*, lines 1005–1238; Book XI, *Guido*, lines 2046–2135.

Caponsacchi's average nine-and-a-half lines, Pompilia's, nine lines, and the Pope's fifteen-and-a-half lines,

These figures show that the Pope, in keeping with his character, employs strophes which are longer than the average length of any other character. He is 'the great guardian of the fold,' 'simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute.' He goes over the whole case, weighs and ponders, and 'lets flow his own thoughts forth' before delivering the final judgment. The substratum of Pompilia's and Caponsacchi's words, on the other hand is 'not thought,' but a sublime emotion. Their verse is therefore more intense, with its shorter and burning periods. Though Pompilia's strophes average almost as long as Caponsacchi's, his often run to a greater length than any of hers. 'He speaks, rapidly, angrily, speech that smites' his judges, who must bear in silence the 'blow after blow' which he strikes in his short and angry sentences. Pompilia's speech is the 'low sighing of a soul after the loud ones;' and in beautifully equable verse she 'endeavours to explain her life.' The change in form of the strophes of the first and last speeches of Guido is very significant. In the first he speaks as "Count Guido," to his social equals, before the governor and his judges, and surrounded with all the conventionalities which a proud and exclusive society could give. We can scarcely ever see through the veneer down into the real man. He speaks, 'now with mock-mildness,' now with passion, but always with the most crafty argument and wonderfully skilful dialectic. But in the second speech he speaks a condemned man. His appeal to the Pope has been vain, and there is no more hope. He is in 'a fetid cell lit by a sole lamp,' and here the Cardinal and Abate listen as they 'crouch well nigh to the knees in dungeon straw.' There is no need now of crafty words and fine-spun argument. It is his last night, and those men are not present as his judges, but as his confessors waiting

to absolve him. All the sham drops away; the man in his real self stands forth, and the true words shine at last.

II. In an examination of blank verse, the unity which ranks in importance next to the larger unity of the strophe, if it has not even a greater influence on its character, is the *verse*, or line. In the matter of the construction of the line, as well as in almost every other part of versification, Browning has been most severely criticised. It has been said that his verses will not scan, and that they are therefore lawless and chaotic. There is no uniformity in his lines, it is said, and, moreover, they are in many cases inharmonious. Now, it cannot be for a moment maintained that Browning preserves a uniform construction in his lines. No poet other than a merely mechanical one, does. Not that any poet would introduce variety into his verse for mere variety's sake, or even to avoid monotony; but the great poet, who embodies his thought in the true sense, must perforce depart from the regular rhythm of the line to give expression to the diversity of his thought and emotion. And thus, in the work of the great poets these departures are not lawless, but are made in accordance with artistic reasons. So long as we look at the verse of the great poets from the outside, as it were, and demand a merely mechanical rhythm, we can never understand their finest harmonies. There is no doubt that one of the chief reasons why the great masters of harmony have been condemned for lawlessness in their verse is that those who presumed to judge looked for nothing but this mechanical construction. They were incapable of appreciating any more complex harmony.

The other great reason for the condemnation of the poets is an inadequate system of prosody. If the preface to *Christabel* did not lay down any new principles of versification, it at least contained a hint to which the prosodists would have done well to give heed. Had they not consistently ignored the principle "of counting the *accents*, not the syllables", the science of prosody would not have

been placed in the ridiculous position of having condemned in turn all the great masters of English verse. But, being founded on the principle of counting the syllables only, this was inevitable; and the same is true to this day. The present system of English prosody finds itself utterly inadequate to account for the facts with which it has to deal. Only the most monotonously mechanical verse conforms to the laws which it lays down.

As was said in the second chapter, *accent* dominates the verse of English poetry, and therefore it follows that the accented syllables in the verse are the most important of its elements. They are the *nuclei*, the centres, around which the unaccented syllables arrange themselves. As was stated in chapter two, the number of the unaccented syllables, their number and order, give to the metres their characteristics.

Of the classes of metres mentioned in chapter two, the Trochaic is mentioned first, as being made up of trochees Since English verse is accentual, the characteristic foot is that which begins with an accented syllable and closes with one, or two, unaccented ones — that is, a Trochee, or Dactyl. That the trochee, and not the iamb, is the primary foot in English verse is shown by the freedom with which the unaccented syllable is used or dropped even in verse of iambic movement, as a thing which is not necessary to the verse. Thus Keats,

> Tales and golden histories
> Of heaven and its mysteries.

Of these lines, corresponding in rhyme and length, the first begins with an accented syllable, while the other takes the anacrusis, giving to it an unaccented beginning and an iambic movement. So Browning, in his blank verse,

> At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
> Born 'mid the briars of my enclosure.

The unaccented syllable is present or absent at the end of lines also. Thus Browning in *Pauline*,

> One pond of water gleams; far off the river
> Sweeps like the sea, barred out from land but one

It may also be placed before or after the caesura. Browning,

> In a lone garden-quarter: || it was eve,
> The second of the year, || and oh so cold!

While this free retention or rejection at pleasure of the unaccented syllables shows its subordinate character, it does not by any means detract from its importance in the line. Even the mere dropping of it at the end of the line has its effect, while the dropping of it at the beginning has the marked effect of giving a new character to the rhythm; and if the regular succession of unaccented and accented syllables is maintained, there results the Iambic rhythm.

The trochaic metres (and the allied dactylic and trochaic-logaoedic metres) are the most lyrical of all the metres, as an examination of any collection of lyrics will show. In Browning's lyric poems there is a greater variety of trochaic metres than of any other class. Since blank verse is the farthest possible from lyric poetry, having as its substance the fusion of thought and emotion; the trochaic metres, that is, verses made up entirely of trochees, would be unsuitable media of expression. Thus, such a line as

> Hated 'wickedness that hindered loving

is very rare in blank verse. This form does occur in Shakespeare,

> Tear for tear, and loving kiss for kiss.
> (*Tit. Andron, V.*, 3,156.)

But it is very exceptional, and I have observed no case of it in Browning.

(1) The prevailing metre of blank verse is, then, the verse which has the anacrusis — that is, which begins with an unaccented syllable, thus forming the Iambic metre.

(2) A second class is the Trochaic-logaoedic metres.

(3) A third class is the Iambic-logaoedic metres.

The expressive character of the different classes of verse differs very widely. The iambic is the most smooth and consecutive, and is the suitable expression of calm and deliberate thought, or of thought deepened but not disturbed by emotion. The second class, opening with a trochee, has an intensifying effect on the rhythm. It has a swift and straightforward movement which is very effective in groups large enough to allow the effect of the rhythm to be felt. Such groups are not uncommon, and are finely expressive of animated thought. E. g.

> "Oh to have Caponsacchi for my guide!"
> Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
> Holding my hand across the world. (*Pompilia*, ll. 1496-98.)

The third class of metres, by their swifter and more agitated movement, are the natural expression of agitated emotion. Where the logaoedic rythm is strongly marked, the great number of unaccented syllables give an air of recklessness and of mockery, such as is given by Byron and Browning by their double and triple rhymes.

The use which is made of these several metres in the different books of the poem shows a fine sense of charac terization. Pompilia and the Pope use the largest percentage of the iambic line — 70 and 63 per cent. respectively, In their calm, and, in a sense, dispassionate, view of the case, they are calm and measured in their verse. Their use of the Trochaic-logaoedic verse is about the same — 27 per cent. Of the agitated iambic-log. verse they make a very slight use — only 3 and 10 per cent., respectively. The 'rapid,' 'angry' speech of Caponsacchi, the speech which terrifies his judges, is in verse of another character from that of Pompilia, or of the Pope. In his, the percentage of iambic lines falls to 56, and the trochaic-log. to 23, while the agitated iambic-log. rises to 21 per cent. Guido, in his first defence, has a percentage of 52 of iambic lines, 24 of troch-log., and 24 of the iamb-log. In

his second speech 61 per cent. of the lines are iambic, 53 per cent. troch-log., and only 6 per cent. iamb-log. This last change is significant in a high degree. In the first speech he uses all the finesse of mockery; but, when he appears the second time, he is no longer a count before his equals. He is a condemned man, and in his earnest plea for life there is no place for aught but earnest words. This change is clearly indicated by the almost complete disappearance of the iambic-logaoedic metre, and the proportionate predominance of the iambic.

III. Another very important element of blank verse is the *caesura*, or *caesural pause*. It divides the lines into two parts, and, according as the manner of division varies, the verse takes on distinctive characteristics. The caesura may vary in two ways: (1) in its *nature;* that is, it may come immediately after an accented syllable — the masculine caesura, or after an unaccented syllable — the feminine caesura. It may vary (2), in its *place* in the line, and may follow any foot except, of course, the last. Browning varies the caesura in both of these ways to a considerable extent; although his verse has a certain stiffness and lack of flexibility, which may be traced for the most part to a lack of variety in the placing of the caesural pause. But, while this is true, *The Ring and the Book* shows great and dramatic differences in the verse of the different characters. Certain parts of the poem show an especial expressiveness of movement which is almost entirely the result of the skilful management of the caesural pause. This may best be shown by an example. And let us first take a few verses from Pope, who is regular in his caesura. This regularity produces a closer verse, but also gives a corresponding lack of variety in the cadences.

> On her white breast || a sparkling cross she wore,
> Which Jews might kiss || and infidels adore.
> Her lively looks || a sprightly mind disclose,
> Quick as her eyes || and as unfixed as those.
>
> (*Rape of the Lock*, II, 7–10.)

With this passage contrast the following lines, in which the greatest variety is shown in the nature and place of the caesura.

> But through the blackness || I saw Rome again,
> And where a solitary villa stood
> In a lone garden-quarter: || it was eve,
> The second of the year, || and oh so cold!
> Ever and anon || there flittered through the air
> A snow-flake, || and a scanty couch of snow
> Crusted the grass-walk || and the garden-mould.
> All was grave, silent, sinister, || when, ha!
> Glimmeringly || did a pack of werewolves pad
> The snow, || those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
> And all five found and footed it, || the track,
> To where a threshold-streak || of warmth and light
> Betrayed the villa door || with life inside.
>
> (*The Ring and the Book*, I, 603–615.)

In these thirteen lines there are examples of the feminine caesura after the first, second and third feet, and of the masculine caesura after the first, second and fourth accents. Besides, there is an example of what is a somewhat frequent occurrence in Browning — a line without a caesura. In this way the variety of cadences is carried to the widest possible limits.

His poetry, on the whole, shows a preference for the feminine caesura after the second foot, and for the masculine caesura after the second accent. This gives the *norm* of his verse, and makes all departures from it significant of artistic design on the part of the poet. Indications of this artistic design are not wanting in the poem, the several speakers showing a preference for the caesura which seems to be most appropriate to them. This is true of both the *nature* and *place* of the caesura.

(1) The masculine caesura, coming after an accented syllable, does not disturb the flow of the verse, as the pause naturally follows an accent. This arrangement of the caesura gives to the verse a smooth and equable movement. The feminine caesura, on the other hand, coming after an unaccented syllable, gives to the verse a more agitated and

broken flow. The feminine is thus the natural expression of emotion or mental disturbance, and the masculine of calm reason and equanimity. This is seen in the most perfect way in the verse of Shakespeare; and it is seen in a less degree in Browning, because his dramatic genius is so much less. Even in Shakespeare the variation is not very large, and yet it mirrors the characteristics of the speakers with great distinctness.[1] So in Browning, the actual figures do not show a wide variation; but the nature of the verse is changed greatly, because each variation is governed by an artistic motive. Pompilia shows a preference for the masculine caesura, using 63 per cent., to 47 per cent. of feminine. On the other hand, the Pope preserves a balance, using 50 per cent. of each. Guido in his first speech, uses 66 per cent of feminine, and in the last speech 52 per cent. This change is very significant of the changed mood of the speaker. In the last speech, earnest reason takes the place of mocking frivolity. Caponsacchi, in his smooth verse, uses 45 per cent. of feminine, to 55 per cent. of masculine caesuras.

(2) The *place* of the caesura has a greater effect on the verse than the *nature* of the caesura. When it is placed near the middle of the line it gives to the verse an even flow; placed near the beginning or end, it gives a bolder and less equable rhythm. Thus Pompilia shows a decided preference for the masculine caesura after the second accent — 30 per cent. This makes the most equable rhythm possible in English verse. It preponderates in Browning's poetry, and is a favorite with Shakespeare. The pause next used most frequently by Pompilia is the masculine after the third accent — 16 per cent., and then the feminine after the second and third feet — each 14 per cent. The positions at the end are hardly made use of at all — only from 4 to 7 per cent.

[1] Price, *Construction and Types of Shakspere's Verse*, p. 39, 43-44.

Caponsacchi prefers the masculine caesura after the second accent — 20 per cent.; then the feminine after the second foot — 18 per cent.; then the feminine after the first and third feet — each 14 per cent.; then the masculine after the third accent — 13 per cent.; then the masculine after the fourth accent — 5 per cent. This shows a wide variety of rhythms.

The Pope has a greater variety than any of the others, in that he shows a much less decided preference for any one place. As a result, the whole movement of his verse is freer and bolder than that of any of the others. The caesura most frequently used is the masculine after the second accent — 20 per cent. Next come the feminine caesuras after the second and third feet — 17 and 16 per cent., respectively. Then come the masculine caesuras after the third and first accents — 12 and 9 per cent., respectively. Least often used are, the feminine after the first foot — 8 per cent., the masculine after the fourth accent — 6 per cent., and the feminine after the fourth foot — 4 per cent.

In Guido's first speech the feminine caesura after the second foot makes up 23 per cent. of the total. Next in frequency come the masculine after the second accent and the feminine after the third foot — each 20 per cent. The other places are represented by from 10 to 3 per cent. In his second speech the preference shifts from the feminine after the second foot to its corresponding masculine — that after the second accent, which makes up 26 per cent. Then follow the feminine after the second foot and the first foot — 19 and 17 per cent. respectively. These differences, taken together with the change in the *nature* of the caesura, give an entirely different atmosphere to the two speeches; and admirably reflect the change in the character of the speaker, before pointed out.

IV. The *ending* of the verse has a great influence in the movement, especially when it is considered in passages.

By a full ending, that is, a weak ending, a falling cadence is given to the verse; and by a catalectic, or strong ending, a rising cadence is given. The two effects are entirely different, as may be seen from the following examples:

> ..... the roughest swell
> Of wind in the tree-tops hides not the pant*ing*
> Of thy soft breasts. No, we will pass to morn*ing* ——
> (*Pauline*)

The movement is very different from that of such lines as the following. These short examples will show how the differences between these two endings are intensified in sustained passages:

> But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
> And where a solitary villa stood.
> (*The Ring and the Book*, Bk. I.)

To any one at all acquainted with Browning's verse it will be plain that the second example is the most characteristic. In fact it may be said that Browning makes no use of the full ending. It is interesting to note that he shows a development in this respect entirely opposite to Shakespeare. The presence of full lines in a play of Shakespeare indicates that it is one of his middle or later period. In Browning, however, the case is different. In *Pauline*, his earliest poem, and written under the influence of Shelley's *Alastor*, there are forty cases of the full ending, or 4 per cent. In *Paracelsus*, his first acknowledged work, the percentage decreases to 3[1], and in the later *Strafford*, to 2, per cent. After that play they disappear, and occur in *The Ring and the Book* only sporadically. In Book I. there is the doubtful one of line 1392 (des*ire*). In Book IV. there are none, according to Mayor[2], and only one in Book VII. (fri*ar*).

By this habitual use of the catalectic ending the individuality of the single verses is very strongly emphasized; and there is no doubt that in this emphasis on the individ-

[1] The computation of Schipper, *Englische Metrik*, II, 1, page 363, §199.

[2] *Chapters on English Metre*, p. 186.

ual verses lies the source of some of the faults of Browning's verse. The accented ending, by bringing the line to an accented close, marks the completion of a line very strongly, and so detracts from the flexibility of the rhythm. Thus in Shakespeare's best verse the lines flow together almost imperceptibly, and of themselves, as it were; and we have no sense of having passed from one line into another. When the ending of a verse is catalectic, and the anacrusis is dropped from the succeeding one, the two accented syllables are thrown immediately together, and the line-rhythm is made doubly strong. Cases of this are comparatively frequent in Browning, rising to about 50 per cent. in Guido's second speech.

This method of verse-construction would produce a rhythm which would be intolerably monotonous, if there were no compensating principle of fusion, which would blend the individual verses together to form the larger strophe-groups. This compensation Browning finds in *enjambement*, or *run-on lines*. By means of this principle, all the advantages of a closely-defined line-rhythm are combined with the characteristic which all the best blank verse has — a free and varied rhythm, and a continuous flow from line to line. Had Browning emphasized his line-structure less and preserved his characteristic boldness in the use of enjambement, the result would have been a chaotic verse, differing as little from prose as the decadent Elizabethan product. But combining the close line-structure and the free enjambement, the result is a verse characteristically his own, and suited to all the purposes of blank verse, without any descent into mere prose.

In *The Ring and the Book* the proportion of run-on lines is large, varying from 24 to 34 per cent. The use of the run-on lines is, however, not varied in any mechanical or arbitray way, but organically, and in keeping with the characters. Pompilia's verse remains more within the limits of the line than the others, only 24 per cent. of her lines

being run-on. Her thought moves in smaller circles than the others, and is at the extreme from the Pope, whose sweeping thought demands 32 per cent. Guido and Caponsacchi take a middle place with about 30 per cent., although Guido has rather the most. These are the average number of run-on lines considered individually; but it is significant that the Pope has larger *groups* of these lines than any of the other speakers. Guido most closely resembles him in his closely-knit second monologue.

V. There is another feature of Browning's blank verse, and, indeed of all his verse, wherein he has shown great power and originality,—his *alliteration*. This has been a feature of all English verse, and has been one of the sources of the charm of it; but it may safely be said that no English poet has made use of it so consistently, not as an occasional charm merely, but as a structural principle in his verse, as has Browning. It may be classified as follows:

(1) To fuse together the half-line, e. g.,

And *f*ly alo*ft*, The *cl*eaving of a *cl*oud, *Sh*y but *s*ure.

(2) To fuse the line, as in the Anglo-Saxon poetry, e. g.,

*T*raverse the half-mile avenue,—a *t*erm.
*M*ere *m*oonshine-structure *m*eant to fade at dawn.
This careless courage as to consequence.

(3) To fuse the latter half of the line to the succeeding line, e. g.,

. . . the *ph*ysician here,
My *f*ather's lackey's son.
. . . the *f*ine
*F*elicity and *f*lower of wickedness.

This has the same effect as enjambement, the similarity of sound emphasizing the connection in the same manner as the lack of a pause.

(4) To fuse together whole strophes, or periods.[1]

In the following lines, an *r*-alliteration runs through them, and is reinforced by the *l*-alliteration which begins in the

[1] What Prof. Sylvester calls "Phonetic Sygyzy," in his *Laws of Verse*.

second last line. This intertwining of alliterating letters is often very complex, and is very beautiful.

*R*ainbowed about with *r*iches, *r*oyalty
*R*imming her *r*ound, as *r*ound the tintless *l*awn
*G*uardingly *r*uns the se*l*vage c*l*oth of *g*o*l*d. (Bk. XI, 2126–9.)

Notice that the line-alliteration *g*—*g* is also in the last line.

It is interesting to observe the use of these several forms of alliteration in the several books of the poem:

1. This class is used as follows: Guido, 25 per cent. of the lines; Caponsacchi, 30 per cent.; Pompilia, 21 per cent., and the Pope, 32 per cent.

2. This class is used: Guido, 27 per cent.; Caponsacchi, 46 per cent.; Pompilia, 43 per cent., and the Pope, 30 per cent.

3. Guido, 12 per cent. in the first speech and 20 per cent. in the second; Caponsacchi, 5 per cent.; Pompilia, 9 per cent., and the Pope 26 per cent.

4. It is difficult to present the distinct uses of this form of alliteration in figures which can make much claim to accuracy or significance, although these differences are very vital and real. The phenomena is similar to that of the strope-formation, and it will be instructive to observe it with reference to the number of lines in the groups yoked together by it. Thus, the Pope has alliterating groups of from 5 to 7 lines. Guido's first monologue contains groups of 7 to 13 lines; but the alliterating groups of his second monologue are smaller. Pompilia's groups hardly ever exceed 4 lines, and Caponsacchi's rarely run beyond 6 lines.

A careful examination of these figures will show that the nature of the thought and emotion of the several speakers is indicated with sufficient clearness by the use which they make of alliteration. The 'low sighing' of Pompilia's soul is mirrored in her preference for small groups of alliteration. Her alliteration rarely goes beyond

the limits of the line; and of the third class, which binds the lines in a continuous series, she makes scarcely any use. The Pope's lines form a reasoned series; and so he uses the third form of alliteration to a very great extent. Guido does the same to a less degree in his second speech, showing a significant difference between it and his first monologue. The last speech is much more reasoned. Caponsacchi speaks 'burning words,' and he accordingly makes a large use of the first and second classes of alliteration. Emotion, not thought, is the basis of his monologue, and he has no need for the sequacious third form of alliteration.

The preference which certain of the speakers show for certain letters in their alliteration is interesting. In the passages specially examined, it has been noted that Guido makes a very free use of the harsh *h*– and *g*– alliteration, and also, less often, *d*, *t*, and *p*. The sibilant s is also frequent. Caponsacchi shows a preference for *f*, *l*, *m;* and Pompilia for *l*, *m*, *n*, and *r*. The Pope's verse is strongly marked by the explosive and vigorous *p*– and *b*– alliterations.

There may be other important characteristics of Browning's blank verse other than those noted in this analysis; but these have seemed the most obvious and important. Whether the essential characteristics of his blank verse have been analyzed in this chapter, will be shown by the completeness with which it may aid the reader to pass from the analysis to the living unity of the poem, and to see the organic loveliness of the thing itself, of which the analysis is but the dry bones.

VITA.

I, Arthur Beatty, was born in 1869, at Kirkton, Ontario. From the public school I went to the Collegiate Institute at St. Marys, whence I matriculated at the University of Toronto, in June, 1889, and was graduated B. A. in June, 1893. In my undergraduate work I attended the lectures of the late Sir Daniel Wilson and of Professors Alexander, Keys, Baldwin, Ashley and Hume. From Toronto I went to Cornell University, taking courses with Professor Corson, and with President Schurman and Professors O. F. Emerson and Titchener. In my work at Columbia University, as University Fellow in English, 1895–96, I attended the lectures of Professor Thos. R. Price, and of Professors G. E. Woodberry and W. H. Carpenter.

To each of my teachers in English I feel great obligation, and especially to Professor Price, whose personal interest and patient sympathy have been freely given me in the preparation of this dissertation.